

Dear Chairman Topping, Mr Irving, Mr Meyer, Mr, Campbell and Mr. Harrison,

Thank you for listening to me at the Planning Commission Meeting last Thursday. I am very thankful that we have a system where individuals can present concerns.

Unfortunately I found that three minutes was not enough. I did not find out about this issue until the public comment period was closed or I would have noted my concerns using that format. So I am hoping that you will read a few more of my questions.

But first I would like to thank you for acknowledging the validity of some of my concerns. I think having the maps have more definition will be helpful. And I think the need for more publicity was acknowledged as well.

My questions:

- If a property has no transmission line accessible what will be the method of hooking it to the grid? Location within the radius of the substation is necessary. But many rural properties, or at least portions of rural properties, do not have direct access to electricity. Will lines be run underground or above ground? If a neighbor needed to run lines through my property would I have a right of refusal?
- What is the definition of degraded land? What measures will be taken to assure that a landowner not degrade his/her land just to be eligible in a few years. Let us not be naïve enough to think that this won't be attempted. Money is a powerful incentive. And don't doubt the creativity of people.
- Is a failed orchard degraded? What about a horse property that has been managed in such a way to have only bare soil?
- Having visited the solar installation at Ivanpah I know that extensive grading is not necessary. Will there be recommendations in place to minimize the destruction to the land. Will there be management guidelines to assure that there is minimal use of herbicides?
- What will be the management strategies to keep vegetative growth in check? Will grazing be encouraged? Grazing is being used in the Carrizo and, though too early to be sure, may actually be improving the health of the ecosystem.
- Is there a risk of fire from the installation itself?
- If a property has an installation that has accessory solar it should be allowed to feed the grid when its production is not needed on site. This needs to be addressed without making the permitting more difficult.
- I have concerns that the Williamson Act is being misused. The intention of the Williamson Act is to keep land in agriculture. Producing electricity is not

agriculture. The landowner gets a tax break for being in the Williamson Act. The county receives less money when a property is in the Williamson Act. This will allow the property owner to make profits while avoiding appropriate taxes. There should be a mechanism for removing those acres being used for energy capture from the Williamson Act and taxing them appropriately.

- Even if a property does not have Class 1 or 2 soil it has the potential of providing ecosystem services and habitat for flora and fauna. It should not be easily devalued. Once the soil is disturbed and the plant cover gone it greatly reduces its ability to absorb the rain when it does come. The plants that grow are absorbing carbon from the air. The plants are the base of the food web. We need all of the plants, even if they are not something we can use to produce income. They benefit us in ways that we do not measure.

I am not against installing electricity generating devices. As I said, we have paid to have one installed on our property. But I am against the streamlining process. We need to proceed carefully. This sets a precedent that I think is not wise.

It would be wonderful if we, as a county, could find a way to encourage the use of rooftop solar. Hiking the Irish Hills one can look down upon Costco, covered with panels. Next door is Home Depot where I do not see panels. It would be very progressive if we could boast that our energy is produced on rooftops and not by taking land.

If you have made it to the bottom of my list I thank you. I did note Mr Meyers comments about workload. I sympathize. But this is an important issue.

Respectfully,

Marti Rutherford

February 2, 2015

Planning Commissioners
SLO County Department of Planning & Building
976 Osos St, Room 200
San Luis Obispo, CA 93408

Dear Commissioners,

I recently learned of the release of the FEIR for the Renewable Energy Streamlining Program (RESP). I recall hearing that the County had been awarded a grant to develop this program quite some time ago, and remember feeling cautiously optimistic that we might accelerate the transition to a clean energy future without sacrificing the beauty, productivity and biodiversity of our agricultural and rural lands. Never again, I thought, would we ever be faced with the prospect of developing industrial scale solar facilities in areas as biologically rich as the Carrizo Plains. Although one does have to wonder how many more solar farms the County really needs when we already have two of the largest plants in the world, I would far prefer to see any additional facilities developed on degraded lands close to existing electricity infrastructure. It is for that reason that I supported the RESP in concept, even though incentivizing and streamlining distributed rooftop solar on homes, businesses and government buildings remained my preferred approach.

Fast forward to January 2015. Did I miss some newspaper articles on this? A public meeting to introduce the public to what was being proposed? It seems that the development of the streamlining program has been streamlined and we are left with a fait accompli. I hope that there is still time to influence the final outcome of this program.

Having read portions of the FEIR, I have a number of concerns. First, I'm uneasy about the size of the area designated as suitable for renewable energy projects. It is enormous, encompassing almost half the county and the bulk of the North County where I live. I understand that the maps only show areas where projects **could** go – not where they **will** go – but it is still a very large swath of undeveloped land that theoretically could be converted to renewable energy projects providing they meet the criteria. I gather the goal is to convert 1500 acres of land, with the majority of the projects being large-scale solar energy facilities (SEFs). I had hoped that the RESP would be a little more selective and would emphasize projects that would utilize already developed land – e.g. rooftops.

I am also concerned about the size of the projects that can be approved with no public review under this program. We live on 20 acres – small in the RESP scheme of things – but rather large to me. Our solar panels currently take up a tiny fraction of the property. If they were to carpet the entire property, that would be a lot of solar panels – not a “small” project in my view. It's even harder to envision 40 acres or 160 acres being allowed next door with nary even a “heads up”. I guess I should be relieved my neighbor put in a small SEF under the old rules and I was notified in advance. I didn't contest it, although I now wish I had looked at little more closely at the plans. The surrounding 8 foot chain link fence with barbed wire and 35 foot power poles are a definite eyesore. I would strongly urge that underground connections from SEFs to the distribution system be required. I would further argue that SEF security be balanced with the needs of wildlife.

Our property provides habitat for all kinds of wildlife, although none are species of concern under RESP – deer, mountain lion, fox, bobcat, coyote, rabbits, wood rats, and more. It also harbors a number of native plants, none of which are listed or found in a CNPS Rare Plant Ranking. That doesn't mean they don't have any value.

There has been a significant decrease in the amount of wildlife habitat over the past 25 years in the North County. Acres upon acres of grazing land and hay fields have given way to sprawling housing developments and fenced vineyards. RESP proposes to convert 1500 more acres to industrial scale facilities. SEFs can be compatible with some wildlife, but not if they have impenetrable fencing around them. One might rebut that lands proposed for RESP don't have comparable ecological values, because they are only allowed on "land that is graded, disturbed, or altered" or "located on Brownfield land that was previously developed for industrial or commercial purposes, and degraded or contaminated and then abandoned or underused only lands". If they were restricted to Brownfields, I might agree, but "graded, disturbed or altered" is much too vague and open to interpretation, especially without public participation in the review process to serve as a check and balance.

In short, I am concerned that the RESP program is not setting the bar high enough for renewable energy projects. We should be strongly promoting and incentivizing rooftop solar facilities first, especially on large commercial facilities like the one at Costco. Where are the solar panels on our county buildings? On the large wineries? We should also be encouraging homeowners to invest in solar. Our choice of last resort should be identifying Brownfields or severely degraded land that might be suitable for SEFs, preferably close to urban areas. Even severely degraded lands can be remediated and restored in most cases to provide natural refuges for wildlife and people.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Holly Sletteland". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Holly" being more prominent than the last name "Sletteland".

Holly Sletteland
4849 See Ranch Lane
Templeton, CA 93465
(805) 239-3928